

New simulator trains Stryker troops

FORT LEWIS: With equipment shipped, soldiers develop skills

BY CHRISTIAN HILL
The Olympian

FORT LEWIS—A \$1.1 million simulator will help soldiers assigned to the three Stryker combat brigades based here make the most of their time before they deploy to combat by this fall.

To train on the Mobile Gun System—the behemoth of the 10 variants of the armored, eight-wheeled vehicles—gunners and vehicle commanders trekked over to the Yakima Training Center, an area both large and isolated enough to fire off the system's 105 mm cannon. Now they can step inside a trailer parked behind the Battle Command Training Center, the post's center for virtual training, saving them time, money and ammunition.

As equipment ships out ahead of the soldiers, the simulators allow new gunners to get acquainted with the system and veterans to retain their proficiency on it until they board a plane for the Middle East.

"With their equipment shipped, there's no other way for them to come over and do the things they need to do," said Sgt. Maj. Howard Briel, a senior non-commissioned officer for the Battle Command Training Center. Fort Lewis is the first post to use the simulator, known as the Advanced Gunnery Training System, receiving it a year earlier

than expected because of the approaching mass exodus.

The 3rd and 4th Stryker brigade combat teams are headed to Iraq for their third and second deployments, respectively.

The 5th Stryker Brigade Combat Team is headed to Afghanistan. The three brigades, all assigned to the 2nd Infantry Division, total about 12,000 soldiers, more than one-third of the post's active-duty force.

Fort Lewis is scheduled to receive two more simulators next year. It already has received simulators for driving and maintaining Stryker vehicles.

On the newest simulator, the sights and firing controls are identical to those within the actual vehicle, but soldiers view a high-resolution virtual environment to identify, engage and destroy targets. The system includes 211 training scenarios.

"We're trying to replicate what the crew is going to face in the various environments," said Donald Bing, an instructional engineer for Lockheed Martin, the system's designer. The simulator also can be used to train Abrams tank and Bradley Fighting Vehicle crew members.

Sgt. Thomas Keen, assigned to the 3rd Stryker Brigade Combat Team, said a new gunner can learn to load, arm and fire the weapon system in an hour using the simulator. "We have an ability to rapidly train people with the system," he said.

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Vehicles take months to reach deployment in Afghanistan

Posted by Scott Fontaine

More than 300 armored Stryker vehicles belonging to Fort Lewis' 5th Brigade, 2nd Infantry Division begin arriving in Afghanistan this week.

Almost 9,500 tons of vehicles and support equipment will arrive in the country over the next two months, according to an Air Force news release.

Most will arrive on C-17 Globemaster III cargo jets, although C-17s from McChord Air Force Base are not involved in the airlift, officials said.

Other equipment will be flown by commercial An-124 Ruslan jets. The airlift effort is expected to last about two months.

Two Strykers can fit inside each C-17. The vehicles were loaded onto a ship from the Port of Tacoma last month and shipped to a staging area at a Pacific Ocean



island. The airlift will take them to southern Afghanistan, where the 5th Brigade will deploy this summer.

It's the first time Strykers have been deployed on this scale in Afghanistan, although members of Fort Lewis' 2nd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment have used the eight-wheeled vehicle in the mountainous country.

The Army boasts seven Stryker brigades—including three at Fort Lewis—but all previous combat experience has been in Iraq.

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